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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines the role and outlines the activities of Australian libraries in meeting the educational, cultural, recreational, and information needs of the physically, sensorily, and mentally disabled. The origins of library services for the handicapped in Australia are discussed, existing services are reviewed, the library needs of disabled people are analyzed, and the types of materials and collections required to meet those needs are described. A proposed national program to provide library services to the disabled in Australia is reviewed and the pattern of library services best suited to Australian needs and conditions is outlined. Also included is a detailed consideration of physical access to library facilities for the handicapped in which physical and social barriers, planning and design, costs, and library equipment are discussed. The Library Association of Australia Statement of Policy on Library Services for Disabled People and a Checklist for Evaluating Library Services for Disabled People are attached. (Author/JL)

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# LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

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## A REPORT TO THE NATION

**Ross Swindley**
**Brian Kidd**

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## FOREWORD

This year, 1981, is the year designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). The year has as its major theme equality and the full participation in the community of people with disabilities. This report concentrates on one part of community life: library service, and attempts to examine to what extent people in Australia with disabilities or handicaps are today able to enjoy access to library services so as to meet their informational, cultural, recreational, and inspirational needs. More importantly, we will look at what the situation should be and what is currently being done in Australia at local, state, and national levels to bring services up to a level which a developed country should deem acceptable, and the future direction of development we can expect to see.

One of the main themes of this report will be the principle that what we must be aiming for are library services for *all* people; that service to disabled people should be an integral component of Australian library services in general, thus recognising the basic and fundamental right to read shared by all citizens.

Some people will question the lack of any mention of toy libraries in this report. It is not an oversight. Libraries are primarily concerned with the preservation and dissemination of recorded information or knowledge; this makes them a very particular sort of educational and advising agency. While acknowledging the important role of toy libraries in providing intellectual and perceptual stimuli to mentally and perceptually handicapped children, I would insist that such an activity is essentially a form of therapy designed to exert an influence on cognitive and sensory processes. A library is something other than a collection of things, even if that collection is organised and the items in it available for loan.

The opening sentence is virtually the only direct reference that will be made to IYDP in this report because library services for people with disabilities is far too important a matter to be seen only in the context of one special year. The fullest possible participation of disabled people in all the services that libraries provide is something that must continue to occupy the minds of all Australians long after 1981 and its posters and slogans are forgotten.

Canberra
May 1981

# INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen in Australia a steadily growing awareness that the library services available to disabled people fall far short of what might reasonably be expected in a developed country. There is at last a realization that disabled people have a right to expect the same accessibility to information as do their non-disabled fellow-citizens if they are to operate in society with a minimum of disadvantage.

It is useful to be clear from the outset exactly what is meant by the terms 'handicapped' and 'disabled'. Sometimes they are used as if interchangeable. The World Health Organization (WHO), in its *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps*, shows the terms as part of an illness-related sequence:

disease → impairment → disability → handicap

based on the following definitions:

(a) Impairments . . . concerned with abnormalities of body structure and appearance and with organ or system function, resulting from any cause; in principle impairments represent disturbances at the organ level.

(b) Disabilities . . . reflecting the consequence of impairment in terms of functional performance and activity by the individual; disabilities thus represent disturbances at the level of person.

(c) Handicaps . . . concerned with the disadvantages experienced by the individual as a result of impairments and disabilities; handicaps thus reflect interaction with and adaption to the individual's surroundings.[1]

The term 'handicap' then, embraces the circumstances that can be expected to place disabled people at a disadvantage in relation to their peers when viewed from the norms of society. Disadvantageous experiences are to be seen in the areas of orientation, physical independence, mobility, occupation, social integration, and economic self-sufficiency. Clearly, different people will be handicapped to different extents by a given disability according to the degree of the disability and the individual's attitudes and personal attributes. Beasley and Glencross, in their study of handicapped tertiary students, stressed the significance of the individual's attitude on the

1 World Health Organization, *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps*, Geneva: WHO, 1980, pp. 13-14.

effects of a disability: "A disability is only as handicapping as the individual so afflicted perceives it to be".[2]

Therefore, it could be argued that it is only to the extent that a user is handicapped that service or materials will vary from the norm. For many people, too, the word 'disabled' implies a loss of functions — that one was once abled and, because of some mishap, became disabled either permanently or temporarily, thus excluding congenital conditions. However, in the interests of identifying with the International Year and of conformity with its terminology, this report addresses the requirements for library services for disabled people.

Many disabled library users will be people who may be termed 'print-handicapped'. This term was defined by the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped[3] as a person who is significantly restricted in his or her ability or capacity to use conventional print material because of a visual handicap or because of a physical handicap which prevents him or her from holding or controlling a book.

In practical terms, it is towards this user group that most library services for the disabled in Australia have been directed. Print-handicapped people constitute a clearly definable and easily delineated group whose difficulty in using conventional library materials arises from the form or medium in which a work is presented rather than from the content of that work. Although the Working Party, in its investigations, did focus on the needs of print-handicapped people, the needs of all groups were acknowledged:

> The perceptually handicapped and those who cannot read normally because they are mentally retarded, illiterate, or culturally disadvantaged should have access to special reading materials that might be beneficial to them. This should be viewed as a right of equal moment to that shared by the blind and visually handicapped and by the physically handicapped.

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2 V.J. Beasley & D.J. Glencross, *Handicapped Tertiary Students: Problems, needs and possibilities*. Bradford Park: SA, Flinders University of South Australia, 1977, p. 5.

3 The Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped was established in May 1977 by the National Library with the agreement of the Ministers for Social Security and for Administrative Services at the suggestion of the National Advisory Council for the Handicapped (NACH). It reported in April 1979.

> This right is seen by the Working Party as demanding a level of library service not lower than that enjoyed by the remainder of the community.[4]

The emphasis by the Working Party on the needs of print-handicapped people arose from a desire to achieve positive results in an area of known need, rather than dissipate momentum by expanding its considerations to cover a wide and less definable area of problems that might better be termed problems of disadvantage, e.g. adult illiteracy, cultural or linguistic disadvantage, economic disadvantage. In a genuine desire to extend the benefits of library service to all people, it is easy to lose sight of what libraries are and what they are properly responsible for. Libraries are largely concerned with the preservation and dissemination of recorded information or knowledge. Libraries organise and make available published materials; they do not create literature. For this reason the needs of intellectually handicapped people for suitable reading materials, such as simplified texts and high interest pictorial content books, are recognised as important but seen as constituting a problem which arises only from the non-availability of sufficient titles of a particular content type. Only educators and writers can answer this need. This is quite a different matter from the problems of perceptually handicapped people, where the barrier may well be imposed by the medium.

However, it is all very well to address the problem of the barrier to knowledge posed by conventional print when talking about library service. What if a person cannot even get into the library? Obviously, library buildings (and many other public buildings) and fittings may impose barriers to material and services that affect physically disabled people who are in no sense print-handicapped. Brian Kidd has addressed the question of barrier-free design on page 33.

In the absence of accurate and current statistical information, a number of attempts have been made to estimate the number of disabled people in Australia who might be deemed to constitute a potential user group for special library services. Some of these have been patently inaccurate, suggesting grossly inflated percentages of the population as being in need of special services. One study went so

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4 National Library of Australia, Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped, *Report of the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped*, April 1979, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1979 (Development of Resource Sharing Networks: Network Study no. 10).

far as to put forward an approximate total figure of close on three million, based on the assumption of the applicability in Australia of selected United States percentages. This represents 20 percent of the total population of Australian in 1978 (14,248,500) and included deaf and hearing-impaired people and emotionally disturbed people. Considering the fact that the Library of Congress Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) in 1977 estimated the number of people in the United States eligible for its services at three million, made up of about two million blind and one million physically handicapped,[5] Australia should indeed be concerned. This sort of calculation points to the inherent difficulties in extracting useful estimates from statistical data collected for other purposes.

The Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped noted the problem of obtaining accurate figures and made the following comment:

> Useful but by no means comprehensive figures can be obtained from *Proposals for Change in the Administration and Delivery of Programs and Services*, the first Report of the Task Force on Co-ordination in Welfare and Health (Canberra, AGPS, 1977) and in the Australian Bureau of Statistics bulletins *Chronic Illnesses, Injuries and Impairments, May 1974* and *Australian Health Survey, 1977-78*. These bulletins suggest that there are some 750,000 persons, not in institutions, who are substantially handicapped in social or recreational activities (equal to a rate of 54 persons per 1000). This condition does not equate in all cases with inability to use normal library materials. The latter group will be smaller. In the absence of more satisfactory figures, however, the aggregate gives some idea of the number of persons who might be potential users of special library services for handicapped people. A reasonable guesstimate of the number of people who are significantly restricted in their ability or capacity to use conventional print materials is perhaps 200 000 (or a rate of about 15 per 1000). Of these, of course, there will be a significant proportion who do not wish to use a library service. Many non-handicapped people do not read books or take advantage of available library services.

5 These figures were a revision of a study of the relevant literature, including published census reports, conducted by the Library of Congress in 1973 to determine the number of handicapped people eligible for DBPH services. The total was then estimated at seven million.

> There is little reason to suggest that handicapped people as a group will behave very differently although the consequential restriction in activities may result, in some cases, in such persons taking up reading by way of compensation for the loss of alternative pastimes. Handicapped people, having less opportunity to purchase reading materials, may also be more dependent on library resources.[6]

Of course, this estimate does not reflect the complete situation because it refers in the main to those people for whom special materials are required. As noted earlier, there are people who cannot, or cannot independently, get into a library in the first place. People who are deaf or who have impaired hearing need special consideration in respect of communicating with library personnel so that they are not severely limited in their participation in library activities which rely on oral communication. The same applies to people with speech difficulties.

It is envisaged that the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Handicaps conducted in 1981 will provide usable statistics which will quantify and indicate the geographic distribution of the disabled population so as to facilitate planning and co-ordination of specialised library services at the national, State, regional, and local levels.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For many years, legally blind people have been served better than any other disabled group in respect of library services. Historically, braille and talking book services have been provided by welfare organisations in each State. Some of these bodies were established in the last century and have well-earned traditions of service.

It could be said that until the 1970s the main thrust of library services for disabled people in Australia rested with agencies funded largely by private donation. Limited by their charters or constitutions, these charity-based organisations could not be seen as parts of the nations's library system in a way which implied any sort of co-ordinated or co-operative infrastructure. It was not until the advent of the Hear a Book service in 1972 that audio recordings of books became avail-

6 National Library of Australia, Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

able, legally, to people who were print-handicapped because of physical disabilities. By supplying Hear a Book cassettes, thus extending services which they had traditionally provided for the less restricted — large print books for visually-impaired, often elderly, readers and home delivery for the house-bound — public libraries began to shoulder some of the responsibility for the needs of a part of the population hitherto treated as among the group of "fringedwellers of the library and information service community".[1] A brief account of events that have influenced the emerging structure of library services for disabled people will be useful here.

In May 1971 the Senate Standing Committee on Health and Welfare issued its *Report on Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons in Australia.* Among its eighty-five recommendations was one "that the National Library conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of a National Braille Library as part of its services". (Recommendation 32.)[2] This was an attempt to provide braille readers with reference and non-fiction materials, it having been stated before the Committee that the existing voluntary organisations could not "meet the needs of intelligent blind people". Little was done to respond to this recommendation; however, the National Library, with the co-operation of the Australian National Council of and for the Blind (ANCB) and the braille libraries in the State capitals, did eventually establish a pool of less-used braille books of continuing value.

It was clear that co-operation and standardisation were called for, and in 1976 the ACT Branch of the Library Association of Australia organised a seminar of library services for blind and physically disabled people. The seminar was held in Canberra on 30 March 1976 and was addressed by Miss Ellen Zabel, the Assistant Chief for Network Development, Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress. Miss Zabel's description of the situation in the United States aroused great interest, and members of the seminar were unanimous in seeing a need for better services in Australia and for co-ordinated examination of the problem.

The three resolutions agreed to by the seminar made it clear that if there were to be national action of any sort, the National Library of

1 D.E. Schauder in his paper given at the National Consultative Seminar on Library Services for the Handicapped held in Canberra in August 1978.

2 Australia, Senate, Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, *Report on Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons in Australia; May 1971*, Canberra: Govt. Pr., 1971 (Parliamentary Paper no. 45 of 1971), p. 18.

Australia would play a major role. In 1976, acting on one of the resolutions the National Library conducted a survey of Australian braille and talking book collections and compiled a directory of resources, which updated a survey prepared in 1973. The directory, listing some 40 institutions and major libraries, was published in July 1977 under the title *Library Services for the Visually and Physically Handicapped in Australia: a Directory.*

The Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries (the Horton Committee) published its Report in 1976. The Committee considered that many of the problems of the provision of library service to disadvantaged groups could be alleviated by providing additional services on already tested and established lines. The Committee also saw a need to devise, test, and evaluate addtional methods to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups[3] and recommended that funds should be provided for these purposes (Recommendation 40)[4]. The Committee also recommended a) that consultation concerning the library and information needs of blind readers should be undertaken at the national level by a Public Libraries and Information Council with government departments and representatives of national organisations assisting the blind, b) that State library authorities should undertake a similar role at State level, and c) that funds be provided within the proposed program to support suitable projects arising from consultations (Recommendation 28).[5]

Arguably the most important event in the development of national library services for disabled people in Australia was the establishment in May 1977 of the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped. The Working Party was established by the National Library with the agreement of the Ministers for Social Security and for Adminstrative Services at the suggestion of the National Advisory Council for the Handicapped (NACH). Its terms of reference were:

> "to investigate and recommend on library services for the handicapped including the possibility of mounting a national conference or seminar organisations interested in the questions".

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3 Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries (A.R. Horton, Chairman), *Public Libraries in Australia: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976, Para 5. 104.
4 *Ibid.*, Para 5.160
5 *Ibid.*, Para 5.107

In March 1978 the National Library, on behalf of the Working Party, conducted a second national survey of library services for the handicapped. The report on the survey[6] showed even more clearly than had the earlier survey that the library services and collections available for print-handicapped people were inadequate and fragmentary, and that service to this group was not an integral part of Australian library services.

The Working Party had decided early that its final report should take cognizance of the views of handicapped people, voluntary agencies, government instrumentalities, and others interested in library services for the handicapped. To this end, the Working Party recommended that a national seminar be held, *Library Services for the Handicapped: a National Consultative Seminar* took place in Canberra on 1, 2, and 3 August 1978 and was attended by 101 people from every State and Territory. The objectives of the seminar were:

- to stimulate the interest of those concerned with the provision of library services and to direct their attention to the special needs of handicapped people.
- to consider the respective roles of public libraries and voluntary agencies in the provision of library type services for handicapped people.
- to suggest lines for the future development of services and the means by which the special needs of handicapped people can be kept under notice.
- to consider ways in which information about the services available can be brought to the notice of potential users.

For the first time in Australia a wide cross-section of people met to discuss how library services could best be developed to meet the informational, cultural, and recreational needs of disabled people. It would be impossible to dispute the importance of this seminar, which went a long way towards firming a consensus on the need for a co-ordinated *national* program of service with a realisation of the advantages to be gained from rationalising resources. There was also a clear expectation that the National Library would play an im-

6 National Library of Australia, *Report on the National Health Survey of Library Services for Handicapped People*, March 1978, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1978.

portant role in future planning. Although no formal resolutions flowed from the seminar, there was agreement that the National Library should be requested:

(a) to construct and maintain a national union catalogue to list library material used by handicapped people held in Australian libraries in order to avoid unneccessary duplication and make maximum use of existing resources.

(b) to identify the Australian and other materials which need to be produced in Australia in a form accessible to the handicapped and to co-ordinate the production program.

(c) to undertake the functions of a clearing house to encourage national and international co-operation in copying of printed materials into braille or audio forms and to co-ordinate the obtaining of copyright permissions.

(d) to act as a centre for international inter-library loans of library materials for handicapped people in Australia.[7]

In addition, the need for a continuing national advisory body concerned with the development of comprehensive library services for people with disabilities was voiced by many participants.

The Working Party on Library Service for the Handicapped reported to the National Library Council in April 1979, after having met twelve times. Its *Report*[8] is a key document and contains eighteen recommendations aimed at improving services through the identification of areas for co-ordination and co-operation within a unified system involving the existing library network and voluntary agencies, with the national, State, and local levels of government sharing overall responsibility.

The National Library Council accepted in principle all eighteen recommendations. Three of these were concerned with the establishment of a national advisory committee to provide a forum for consultation and a focus for co-ordinated effort. Accordingly, the Council established the National Advisory Committee on Library

7 Library Services for the Handicapped: A National Consultative Seminar, Canberra, 1978, *Papers*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1979 (Development of Resource Sharing Networks: Network Study no. 9), pp. 29-30.

8 National Library of Australia, Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped, *Report of the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped*, April 1979, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1979 (Development of Resource Sharing Networks: Networks Study no. 10).

Services for the Handicapped early in 1980. The Committee has the following terms of reference:

> To consider the special needs of handicapped people for library services and to advise on the organisation, development, co-ordination and operation of these services to meet these needs. In particular, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, to

(a) advise on all aspects of the National Library's services to the handicapped.

(b) advise on ways and means of ensuring that co-ordination and integration of the National Library's services with other available community facilities and services.

(c) advise on the standards of library services and facilities for the handicapped.

(d) advise on the provision of adequate training facilities and courses for professional librarians and other staff connected with library services for the handicapped, and on the recruitment of such staff.

(e) advise on means by which handicapped people themselves may best be involved in the planning for the provision of library services suitable to their requirements.

(f) advise on, and stimulate research into, selected aspects of library services to the handicapped.

(g) assist in organising conferences, seminars and the like, and visits by overseas experts on library services for the handicapped and to encourage liaison between national, state and municipal authorities and voluntary organisations concerned with library services for the handicapped.

(h) advise on such other matters as may be referred by the National Library Council and on all other matters concerning Library services for the handicapped which the committee considers should be examined.

To May 1981, the Committee had met three times.

If the preceding account of events at the national level has emphasised planning, co-operation and co-ordination rather than direct service it is for good reason. The provision of libraries is in general a State responsibility; consequently, the development of adequate, integrated library services for disabled people will depend

upon planning at the State level. For this reason the Working Party went on to recommend the establishment of State Advisory Committees. In short, it was intended that any nationwide structure would be a loose one which reflected the existing division of tasks but with a heightened awareness of the need for planning and co-ordination to achieve a rationalisation of resources. This would be achieved by providing for formal consultation and co-operation between government agencies and voluntary organisations. Tasks which were best perfomed nationally, such as the provision of centralised bibliographic services and the promotion of standardisation, and which were, indeed, extensions of services already provided by the National Library in discharge of its statutory functions, would be considered within the ambit of the National Library. The direct provision of services, "books in the hand", would be best achieved by State, regional, and local library authorities together with the voluntary welfare agencies.

The establishment of State advisory committes has started; Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania already have committees. At the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers reponsible for Cultural Affairs and the Arts held in Canberra on 13 February 1981 there was unanimous agreement on the need to establish State advisory committees on library services for the handicapped, and it was indicated that where they did not already exist their establishment was imminent.

## EXISTING SERVICES

At present library services for disabled people in Australia are characterised by extreme fragmentation and lack of co-ordination. With the exception of large print material provided by many public libraries for use by visually impaired readers and, more recently, by a smaller number of public libraries, audio cassettes, the nation's public library system could not be said to cater to any great extent for the reading needs of the visually, physically, or mentally/perceptually handicapped. Blind readers are the best served group — here there has long been an established service with the provision of braille, and, in recent times, talking books. These services have been provided by special schools and by the libraries attached to welfare agencies. Even so, the largest collection of braille books in the country, that of the Braille and Talking Book Library in Melbourne, contains only some 6,000 titles.

The National Library's 1978 survey of library services for the handicapped was the first truly comprehensive investigation undertaken in this country. It provided a mass of important information, and remains today the only significant survey of Australian resources and services in this area even though, quantitatively, the picture will have changed slightly since then.

Table 1 shows the estimated number of titles in each medium held by each type of library surveyed in 1978, as reported by responding institutions.[1] It is clear from these figures that public libraries have, in general, accepted responsibility for the provision of large print materials and open-format spoken word cassettes (most of which will be Hear a Book and Australian Listening Library titles), while welfare agencies and special schools have concentrated on providing braille books and Clarke & Smith talking books. Since the survey, the shift towards the 4-track Library of Congress format for audio material has accelerated, with Clarke & Smith equipment being phased out. The Royal Blind Society of New South Wales, for instance, is currently re-equipping its 4,000 clients with the Telex cassette machine, which is the player provided by the Library of Congress program for blind and physically disabled readers in the United States. In Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania, also, 4-track is almost certain to become the chief audio format.

This change of format is being accompanied in New South Wales by a subtle change in the pattern of service. RBS is now providing 4-track audio books to fifteen public libraries in the State for use by print-handicapped people. Since the playback machines (also provided) are able to play 2-track cassettes as well, this service can supplement the Hear a Book, or other open-format, reading material made available by the public library acting as a direct service delivery point. This is an excellent example of the sort of informal co-operation and resource-sharing which must take place if we are to see the development of servics for disabled people as an integral component of the nations's library system.

In the main, the recreational reading needs of visually handicapped people are met by the mail library services of the welfare organ-

1 This table reproduced by courtesy of the National Library of Australia. The total of these holdings shown should not be interpreted as representing unduplicated titles. There is great duplication between libraries of titles in all mediums. For example, the holdings of large print books in one public library will be duplicated by the collections in most other public libraries.

**Table 1: HOLDINGS OF SPECIAL MATERIALS BY TYPE OF LIBRARY**

| Type of library | No. of survey respondents | No. of respondents who did not answer this question | No. of libraries included | No. of titles held | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Braille | Talking books (Clarke & Smith) | Cassettes (spoken word) Incl. Hear a Book | Tapes (reel to reel) | Large Print | Moon books | Other | Total |
| Welfare Organisation | 24 | 1 | 23 | 16 484 | 8 944 | 2 467 | 315 | 1 898 | 1 571 | 774 | 32 453 |
| State | 4 | | 4 | | 450 | 2 250 | | 8 513 | | | 11 213 |
| Other public | 161 | 15 | 146 | | 100 | 18 814 | 260 | 126 833 | 300 | 1 977 | 148 284 |
| University | 1 | | 1 | | | 791 | | | | | 791 |
| College of advanced education (CAE) | 1 | | 1 | | | 3 964 | | | | | 3 964 |
| College of technical & further education (TAFE) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| School | 9 | 1 | 8 | 7 052 | 128 | 1 410 | 864 | 1 284 | | 2 698 | 13 436 |
| Government Department | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other | 3 | | 3 | | 1 342 | 11 | 27 | 4 153 | | | 5 533 |
| TOTAL | 203 | 17 | 186 | 23 536 | 10 964 | 29 707 | 1 466 | 142 681 | 1 871 | 5 449 | 215 674 |

isations. While the existing postal privileges remove much of the financial burden of operating this kind of service, problems do exist. For example, the client is left with the, often onerous, job of returning books to the lending institution. People with mobility restrictions are faced with a trip to the post office. This would appear to present a prime opportunity for public library/welfare agency interface with the local library housebound service extended to include pick-up and return of used braille and audio books.

Tertiary education institutions were revealed by the survey to be "conspicuous as non-providers of special reading materials". From questionnaires returned to the National Library in response to the 1981 survey conducted to prepare a new edition of the Library's directory of library services available for disabled people, it is clear that little has taken place since 1978 in terms of resource building. At the same time, it would be inappropriate to construe the virtual lack of materials for print-handicapped students as a lack of concern. Academic librarians responding to the survey made the comment that absence of material reflected an absence of demand. The same assessment was reached by Beasley and Glencross in their study: appropriate assistance would be forthcoming if required.

While the needs of the print-handicapped student for reading materials have been virtually disregarded by universities and colleges, with some exceptions such as Monash University in Melbourne and Deakin University in Geelong, there has been an increase in the attention directed towards alleviating the problems encountered by physically disabled persons wishing to take advantage of the facilities and resources of these institutions. Project MIND (Meeting the Information Needs of the Disabled), established in 1979 by the University and College Libraries Section of the Library Association of Australia, has done much to "raise consciousness" of the problems encountered by disabled students on campus. A survey of disabled library users at Monash University[2] conducted by D.E. Schauder and P. Gorman as part of Project MIND revealed the sorts of obstacles and difficulties that face disabled tertiary students. Through a flourishing structure of Contact Panel Groups and Regional Contact Panel Groups, the project has effected welcome alterations to the built enviroment and has been associated with continuing education activities aimed at

2 P. Gorman & D.E. Schauder, "Disabled Library Users at Monash University", *Australian Rehabilitation Review*, vol. 5 no. 1 (1981) pp. 36-45.

"sensitising" library personnel to the problems encountered by disabled users.

But the focus of MIND appears to be on access, mobility, and communication problems, which of course are not confined to the library but will indeed be present in just about every public situation in which a disabled person attempts to participate. The major task of providing special library materials continues to rest with the tertiary resource services of institutions such as the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB), in Melbourne, the Royal Blind Society of NSW, in Sydney, and the Queensland Tape Service for the Handicapped, in Brisbane. Voluntary agencies such as these play an important role in providing transcriptions into audio, braille, and other formats of text materials required by students at all levels of education, particularly the upper levels of secondary education and tertiary education. These personal services respond rapidly to students' needs and to the specialised needs of others, and could not be provided as satisfactorily from a centralised government agency.

At the primary and secondary school levels, special medium reading materials are provided for the blind and severely visually handicapped students by the schools for the blind. St Edmund's, in Sydney, and St. Paul's, in Melbourne, are two special schools with vigorous braille production programs which provide required texts. The latter is investigating the installation of a computer already by the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children in Sydney.

## NEEDS

The library needs of disabled people are enormously diverse. The range of reading interests runs the full gamut of human knowledge, while needs for book reviews, story hours, adult education activities, reader advisory services, and bibliographic aids are the same for all people. The type of service called for will extend from school to public library to college and university. In its report the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped expressed the belief that the information needs of readers with disabilities are no less than and little different from, those of non-disabled readers and asserted that library service should accomplish the same objectives for visually and physically disabled readers as for the sighted and firm of limb:

> In a society that prizes a literate and well-informed citizenry,

> there can be no room for discrimination based on personal physical attributes in making available the sources of information and knowledge necessary to the functioning of all members of that society. The availability of literature makes possible influence upon the community to make literature available in forms which can be used by the individual. Further, services must be made available in a way that avoids any suggestion of stigma or discrimination and this will entail use of the standard channels of library service delivery, such as public libraries, community information services, and citizens' advice bureaux.[1]

Accepting the general principle that, as far as practicable, library services for disabled people should be seen as a component of highgrade library services to all people — a principle that emerged also from the national consultative seminar in 1978 — the Working Party made its recommendation:

> THAT a comprehensive national program of library services to citizens unable to use conventional print materials be established as soon as possible. This program should operate at three levels, with responsibilities shared among national, state and local levels of government. Organisations and agencies concerned with the welfare of the handicapped should be involved in the development and operation of the program at all levels. As far as practicable service to handicapped readers should be available from the public library system.

This is an important recommendation because it expresses the philosophy that underlies much of the intent of the Working Party. It is in harmony with the trend towards mainstreaming and desegregation that we are seeing gain prominence throughout the world today.

With a view to seeing the early specification of minimum requirements for service to disabled people, the Working Party then recommended that the Library Association of Australia address the question of formal standards. There is much to be gained from codifying levels beneath which service should not fall, formulating objective standards which will act as a benchmark by which institutions may judge their own performance — and be judged.

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1 National Library of Australia, Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

Australia would benefit from a document along the lines of that published by the American Library Association.[2] To date, the only document to appear from the LAA has been its "Statement of Policy on Library Services for Disabled People", which is reproduced as Appendix 1.

While the information needs of disabled users can be said to be similar to those of the rest of the community, the rendering to this group of library services of a standard not less than that enjoyed by others is attended by problems arising from the need to compensate for the inability or reduced capacity to use conventional print materials. Quite apart from the reduced mobility that characterises the majority of visually and physically handicapped people, the need for specialised materials and mechanical or optical aids coupled with the relatively low density of the disabled population means that equivalent service can be achieved only by making available additional funds. In the United States, the Committee on Standards for Library Services of the Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services for the Blind (COMSTAC) estimated that providing special library material and services to blind and partially sighted readers, for instance, will cost on average at least five to seven times as much providing the same level of service to sighted people.

Since it is unrealistic in the present economic climate to expect significant increases in the provision of public money, there will clearly be a need for a re-allocation of priorities and funds. There will be, above all, a need for meticulous professionalism, for co-operation in all areas of materials production and control, and of service delivery, and for a firm grasp of the meaning and practice of resource sharing and rationalisation.

It is worth saying something here about the concept of resource sharing. The primary goal of resource sharing is to maximise the availability of materials and services at the minimum expense, on the fundamental premise that no library can posses substantially all, or any exhaustive part, of the world's literature. Consequently, a sharing of holdings among libraries is increasingly accepted as a necessity and as the only realistic means of providing the full range of resources needed for service. Resource sharing in its most positive aspects

2 Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, Standards for Library Service to the Blind and Physically Handicapped Subcommittee, *Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.* Chicago: American Library Association, 1979.

entails reciprocity, where each library has something useful to contribute to others and is willing and able to make this resource available when needed. The Royal Blind Society of New South Wales is able to provide an audio book service for a Spanish speaking reader because it is able (and willing) to tap the Spanish language resources of the Library of Congress program, which of course caters for what is in the United States a significant ethnic group. It would be uneconomic in this country to devote sparse resources towards producing any quantity of recreational reading material in a language such as Spanish. This arrangement illustrates also the advantages to be gained from format and equipment standardisation.

In other words, given the relatively small number of titles available to print-handicapped readers through each service library, resource sharing is a cost-effective means of pooling and sharing those resources and is founded in seeing each collection as constituting a component of the national resource which is exploited through an established and regulated inter-library leading system. It is essential that all libraries serving disabled users, particularly the libraries of welfare organisations which have been outside the mainstream of the Australian library network, see their collections in this way and transcend State and organisational boundaries. It is not overly optimistic to foresee the day when the inter-library loan of braille volumes can be superseded by remote high-speed duplication of magnetic tape for the machines which will surely evolve from the Digi-cassette, or when a central library can respond to a teletype request from a branch or regional service library for a talking book title by playing its master tape over satellite or microwave channels the following night, a high-speed duplicator then producing as many copies as required.

Central to the proper functioning of a inter-library lending system is a union catalogue. In its role as the national bibliographic agency, the National Library began work in 1979 on the creation of a national union catalogue of special materials for print-handicapped readers. The first issue of the *National Union Catalogue of Library Materials for the Handicapped* (NUC:H) was distributed in March 1981. As well as author and title entries for all works listed, the catalogue contains Library of Congress subject entries for non-fiction. Subject access was considered necessary to enable fuller exploitation of available reading materials and to provide the opportunity to identify gaps on a national scale. Together with NUCOM (National

Union Catalogue of Monographs), SALSSAH (Serials in Australian Libraries: Social Sciences and Humanities), etc., NUCH is a component of Australia's National Union Catalogue.

It is hoped that this catalogue, when its use becomes widespread, will help to raise bibliographic awareness on the part of service and producing agencies and bring about the degree of standardisation essential to the operation of a modern library system. Agreement on bibliographic standards is the key to efficient and effective communication between libraries, here and overseas, facilitating national and international inter-library loan transactions. Everything that Charles Ammi Cutter said as long ago as 1876 in his rules for a dictionary catalogue applies with equal force to a library supplying braille and audio books. There is a great need in libraries providing special materials for principles of professional librarianship to gain dominance over the "specialness" of the services or materials involved.

Much has been said of late about the need for consumer involvement in determining the nature and content of the library services provided for disabled people. Certainly there is a need for greater participation by users in areas such as selection, production standards, and service delivery than there has been to date, and there are positive indications that this is coming about. Disabled readers are, rightly, no longer prepared to sit back and accept with gratitude what is offered, and there is a growing spirit of consumerism in this area. At the same time, it would be unfortunate if librarians were to abnegate their role. As professionals, they have special knowledge of the principles that underlie the provision of library service, and are, in the long term, in the best position to develop appropriate programs. Over-emphasis on consumer participation will dissipate as much momentum as will the gathering debate on linguistic preference in terminology relating to disabled people.

Good library services can be achieved only when there is good communication between the reader and the library staff. Library staff need to have an understanding approach to all their readers but more so for a reader who is disabled in any way, especially where the disability restricts his ability to communicate his needs. The word "sensitised" was used several times during the 1978 seminar, and the importance of sensitising staff to the needs of disabled users stressed. For example, even a simple thing like not being able to hear the

auditory signal warning of the library's imminent closing may cause embarrassment or misunderstanding. As Ruth Velleman puts it

> The elimination of barriers so that disabled people may live among the able-bodied in dignity and equality will count for nothing unless the first and most important barrier of all — prejudice — is eliminated. Stereotyping people because they look "different" from the norms, which society has established, must cease. We, as librarians, in order to give service to all segments of society, must look within ourseleves to deal with our attitudes toward all patrons so that we may give service with the necessary care and sensitivity.[3]

Clearly there is a need for the training of all library staff members providing public services, in order to make them aware of the difficulties disabled people face in using libraries and library materials, and how these difficulties may be overcome. Library staff should be aware of services offered not only by their own library but also by other libraries and agencies in their locality. There must be an end to the all too frequent attitude that if the item requested is not held by the particular library or the particular branch then it is not available or does not exist. This is an aspect of resource sharing that will be particularly important when mainstreaming takes place.

The provision of adequate training which will help librarians to feel at ease with disabled people and to have some knowledge of the kinds of materials and services they need is a problem in view of the already crowded curricula of libarianship courses. Perhaps the need is best met by refresher courses, continuing education programs, seminars and workshops. The danger here, of course, is that one is usually preaching to the converted.

Nowithstanding the difficulties, encouragement should be given — perhaps by the Library Association of Australia — to the involvement of library schools in training of this sort.

The Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped, in its report, expressed the opinion that technology would in the long term play an increasing role in the provision and delivery of library materials and services for disabled readers, especially those who are print-handicapped. While it is not the purpose of this report to describe the various devices that are available or are currently being

3 Ruth A. Velleman, *Serving Physically Disabled People: an Information Handbook for All Libraries*, New York: R. R. Bowker, 1979, p. 20.

developed in various countries, it is appropriate here to draw attention to the fact that there are in existence devices that herald a new era and to voice the need for continued monitoring of technological developments.

Australia now has two Kurzweil Reading Machines (KRMs), both situated in Melbourne. The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind took the big step of acquiring the first of these early in 1980, partly for investigative purposes. The KRM translates print into synthesised voice output (with special modules available for braille output and industry-compatible computer interface) and represents a means of overcoming the fixed division between library collections which can be used by print-handicapped readers and those that cannot. While the KRM, and the machine that will evolve from it, will not, foreseeably, replace talking books and braille for recreational reading, their use by students, academics, and professionals for informational purposes will be an important element in future library provision. Recommendation 9 of the Working Party has already been implemented by the National Library with the establishment of a clearinghouse of information about relevant technological advances in order to promote awareness of new developments and their cost-effective utilisation in Australia.

Finally, perhaps one of the most important needs is promotion of existing services. Like the total library services offered to the public at large, those available for people with disabilities are not fully utilised by all the people eligible and in need because of lack of awareness of their existence. Libraries and agencies in Australia must be constantly alert to the problem of identifying potential users of their services, and take steps to ensure that all avenues of communication, including medical, welfare, and rehabilitation services, are enlisted in an effort to bring library services to all who can benefit.

## MATERIALS

The problem of providing sufficiently large and diverse collections of reading materials which cater for the reading needs of print-handicapped users is one which does not admit of a single simple solution. With the very best of intentions no agency could guarantee the availability, on demand, of special format reproductions of all works currently at the call of the non-handicapped reader.

The production of special reading materials in Australia centres on

the welfare agencies and special schools, many of which provide *inter alia* library services and produce library materials by converting ink-print into braille and audio formats. In the short-term, at least two measure are needed to raise the level of services: a) maximum utilisation of existing resources through effective resource sharing, and b) increased production of special medium materials. The former will be facilitated by the union catalogue and by standardisation of equipment and formats to allow for free interchange between States.

The first, important step to be taken to increase production is to eliminate all unnecessary duplication of effort. No title should ordinarily be brailled, audio-recorded, or converted to any medium by more than one agency. To transcribe one title in five agencies is to reduce the national resource by four other titles that might have been produced with the given funds and personnel. Still, we know that this is happening all the time. Publishers express surprise, and increasingly annoyance, when they are approached by a number of agencies requesting copyright permission for the transcription into a special medium of the same title.

Consultation of the union catalogue would reveal whether or not a work in the desired medium is already held in an Australian library; either a copy could then be borrowed on inter-library loan or a copy ordered from the producing agency's master. This is not, in itself, sufficient to preclude duplication of effort. It is necessary also for agencies to be aware of work in progress by others, particularly in the case of currently popular works. To this end, a clearinghouse to encourage national, and international, co-operation in the copying of print materials into braille, audio, or other forms should be established. An agency intending to transcribe a title into a medium other than print would send to the centre, for inclusion in the production register or "works in process" file, a notification of this intent, thus signifying that work was either in progress or about to commence. This notification might include an expected date of completion for the information of other agencies contemplating transcription of the same work. No transcription would begin before a check had been made of both the union catalogue and the production register to ensure that duplicaton was avoided. The establishment and maintenance of a union catalogue and a production register was recommended by the Working Party on Library Services to the Handicapped as tasks for the National

Library. Both programs are in hand. The need for co-operation in production was also voiced by the Working Party in Recommendation 3.

> That State and local public libraries and other agencies providing library services for the handicapped establish means for co-operative production and distribution of special medium reading materials for handicapped people.

The selection of titles to be produced in special mediums should be a decentralised process with a view to allowing users, as well as those involved at the local level providing direct services, to influence decisions regarding selection. No selection restrictions should be imposed on the basis of subject, genre, or language. The general reading needs of all groups — the aged, the young, professionals, and others — should be reflected in collections in proportion to the total print-handicapped population served.

Although Section 53D of the *Copyright Act* added by the *Copyright Amendment Act* 1980 relates to copying materials for handicapped readers it has not yet been proclaimed. The present (May 1981) law relating to copyright in Australia, the *Copyright Act* 1968, makes no specific provision relating to the use of copyright material by or on behalf of blind or physically disabled people. Their use of copyright material or the reproduction of it into suitable formats is on the same basis as applies to all users. Subject to the *Copyright Act* the copyright in a literary, dramatic, musical, or artistic work is infringed by a person who, not being the owner of the copyright, and without the licence of the owner of the copyright, does or authorises the doing of any act comprised in the copyright (Section 36). Accordingly, it is an infringement to reproduce a work, or a substantial part of it, without the owner's licence — or to authorise such reproduction. There are provisions which relate to "fair dealing" and which permit librarians to reproduce periodical articles or a reasonable portion of a work. It is unclear how far those who provide library services to print-handicapped readers can rely on these provisions. In any case, it is unlikely that they would cover the reproduction of a whole work.

It is difficult to generalise about the current practices of producers of braille and audio materials in Australia. Although information was sought by the 1978 survey the response to the particular question was not satisfactory. About twenty organisations answered and, of these, twelve at that time reported that they never sought permission from

copyright owners, four always sought permission, and four did so sometimes. Generalising from this small sample it appeared that educational institutions and organisations producing materials for print-handicapped students tended not to seek permission from copyright owners. In some cases this was due to the long time it takes to obtain such permission, which is usually eventually given without a fee being required.

Few agencies reproducing materials for print-handicapped people without waiting for permission wish to break the law. It is perfectly clear too that few publishers wish to impede the provision of special reading materials for those who are unable to use conventional print materials. Particularly in the case of agencies producing special one-off materials for educational courses, where speed is often of the essence, the statutory licensing scheme created by Section 53D of the Copyright Amendment Act 1980 — which will come into force on 1 August 1981 — would appear to be a step forward. Under the provisions of this section braille, large-print, audio, and photographic copies of published works or parts of works for use by a print-handicapped reader for the purpose of research or study or for the purpose of otherwise instructing himself on any matter may be made by institutions assisting such readers without the permission of the copyright owner, subject to the payment of a fee (which may or may not be called for).

In brief, to copy without the permission of the copyright owner under the provisions of Section 53D it will be necessary to comply with the following conditions:

a) the work to be copied has been published

b) the work is not separately available in an audio, braille, large print, or photographic version within a reasonable time at an ordinary commercial price

c) a copying record is made stating identifying bibliographic details as prescribed in the Act, the date of copying, the form in which the copy is made, and the particulars of such other matters as are prescribed. The records must be retained in a manner which allows access by copyright owners as prescribed

d) a notation is made on each copy stating that the copy was made on behalf of the copying institution and the date on which it was made. In the case of a sound recording, the required information

must be included as a message immediately before the commencement of the recording.

For the purpose of the Copyright Act 'handicapped reader' means:

a) blind person;

b) a person suffering severe impairment of his sight;

c) a person unable to hold or manipulate books or focus or move his eyes; or

d) a person suffering from a perceptual handicap.

Institutions are still able to negotiate permission to copy on an individuual basis, and it is expected that many will choose to continue to do this. It has been suggested that a central clearinghouse might be established to facilitate the obtaining of copyright permissions in an expeditious and routine manner, which would lessen demand on publishers and which would be in a position to minimise duplication of transcription. Envisaging such an operation as linked to the proposed national production register or in-process file, the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped recommended that the National Library perform this function.

Naturally enough, a publisher is anxious to protect the rights of the copyright owner by ensuring that his recompense for his labour is not unduly jeopardised by copying. Copyright considerations have been an important factor in decisions which have been made concerning the format of audio reproductions of materials for blind readers. The question that has to be faced is whether specially-designed non-commercial formats (closed formats) or commercially-available formats (open formats) should be used. In Australia both open and closed formats are used. The Clarke & Smith talking book and the Library of Congress (LC) 4-track cassettes are examples of closed formats; the products of Hear a Book Service Inc. are in an open format. Closed formats provide easier copyright control as it is more difficult to make unauthorised copies. In addition, specialised equipment[1] must be used, thus further limiting access.

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1 The use of specialised, dedicated equipment has real benefits. For example, the LC machine was designed specifically for use by blind and physically handicapped readers and is the result of extensive field testing. It is lightweight, portable and rugged, operates from mains or self-contained rechargeable batteries, has large controls with raised symbols, variable speed control, and auto shut-off.

Actually, it is difficult to believe that the availability of an audio recording of a book will affect sales of the print edition. A talking book is a substitute — a not very good substitute — for an ink-print edition. Generally speaking, where someone can read normally he will almost invariably prefer the ink-print to the audio version of a book or periodical. The disadvantages of audio materials are their slowness and inconvenience compared with conventional reading materials. One can read about three times as quickly as one can listen to the same material. Add to this the lack of backtrack and scan ability and it becomes apparent that only an initial novelty value would tempt a non-disabled reader.

The comments made in the preceding section about the need for standards are not confined to the control of collections and the provision of service. They apply just as much to production. It is no exaggeration to say that the standard of identification, labelling, and packaging to be found on some special medium reading materials produced by Australian agencies would lead a professional librarian outside this field to the conclusion that concealment was the prime goal. It is not good enough for a producing agency to adopt the attitude that a braille book does not need eye-readable front matter which includes the sort of information everyones expects, reasonably, to find in an ink-print publication (e.g. author, title, edition statement, imprint, volume number, etc.) on the grounds that it is meant to be read by a blind person. If a sighted librarian cannot intervene it is unlikely the book will get into a blind person's hands.

The frequent glaring examples of low quality of recording and inadequacy of bibliographic information accompanying braille and audio productions point to a desperate need for an Australian standard which covers all aspects of production of special medium materials. The technical standards used by the Library of Congress would provide a good starting point for the development of a set of Australian standards. This is a task that might well be performed by a national committee of major producers. Such a body might also establish machinery for the accreditation of braille transcribers.

## NATIONAL STRUCTURE

Few would disagree that a national program of library services for disabled people should have as one of its prime goals the integration

of such services with the nation's library system so that people with disabilities are able to enjoy a level of library service which reflects an awareness of their rights as citizens to enjoy access to reading materials which satisfy their information, recreational, and cultural needs. It is reasonable also that disabled people should be able to exercise choice of service delivery channel as far as practicable. The development of a comprehensive and co-ordinated national library service with these goals will require a high degree of co-operation and planning at national, State, and local levels. There will be a need for long-range planning which reflects the needs of users and which takes into account current trends, developing technology, and related programs.

What pattern of service delivery is best suited to Australia? Few people favour, or consider feasible here, a centralised system such as that operating in the United States, where the Library of Congress is a major producer of special materials and provides a direct service via a network of multistate centres. In Australia, it would appear to be advantageous to retain the existing decentralised infrastructure but with co-ordination at national, State, and local levels. This structure will depend for success upon increased consultation and formal co-operation between government agencies and voluntary organisations. The latter have an important role to play in providing specialised library services and transcriptions into non-print mediums, especially for students at the upper levels of secondary education and tertiary education, although there will be an increasing call to eliminate differentiation between the types of disability which render an individual eligible for service from particular agencies. The Australian national program must build upon what exists and what has been achieved to date, recognising that the present pattern, while deficient, does reflect the geo-political realities of the country.

The opinion of the Working Party on Library Services for the Handicapped that there was a need for the establishment of permanent advisory/consultative machinery to bring about the sort of development of services envisaged was reinforced by the views expressed at the national consultative seminar in Canberra in 1978. Participants clearly saw certain tasks as ones which would best be performed at the national level and others which were properly the responsibility of State authorities. The former were in the main extensions of national bibliographic and information services already provided by the National Library in discharge of its statutory

functions. In its report, the Working Party identified a number of these tasks:

(a) building and maintenance of a union catalogue of library materials for handicapped people

(b) operation of a clearinghouse to facilitate co-operation in transcribing materials into special formats

(c) operation of a clearinghouse to assist in obtaining copyright clearances for transcription

(d) operation of a centre to assist in obtaining international inter-library loans

(e) operation of a clearinghouse of information relevant to those working in the field of library services for handicapped people

(f) publication of a newsletter to assist in forwarding national tasks, in particular (b) and (e) above

(g) encouragement of training of library staff who deal with handicapped people

(h) establishment and promotion of standards for service, for library buildings, and for transcription into special formats (perhaps in co-operation with the Library Association of Australia)

(i) compilation of relevant statistics on a national basis in consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics

(j) organisation and support of seminars

(k) maintenance of a central pool of lesser used materials to supplement collections held in the States

(l) commissioning and encouraging production of special medium materials for handicapped people

This list reflects the fact that the Commonwealth Government has no responsibility for the provision of library services other than the Parliamentary Library, the National Library, and Libraries of federal government departments. In establishing its National Advisory Committee on Library Services for the Handicapped, the National Library Council was cognizant of the fact that any national body was limited to a role of advisor and agent for the facilitation of co-ordination and co-operation between the direct providers of library service.

Since, as we have noted, direct service delivery is the responsibility of government at the State and local levels, the Working Party went on

to identify some of the many tasks which could be performed only by State agencies:

(a) co-operation (and co-ordination) between State, municipal, and voluntary organisations providing library services for handicapped people

(b) liaison with the National Library

(c) encouragement of meetings, conferences, seminars or associations which permit the coming together of librarians, administrators and users of library services to discuss common problems

(d) provision of expertise in setting up local services through public libraries and other institutions in the State

(e) provision of expertise for repair and maintenance of user equipment

(f) maintenance of standards

(g) provision (and/or encouragement) of training courses for library staff who deal with handicapped readers

(h) establishment and maintenance of a central pool or resource centre of materials and equipment for handicapped readers

The State advisory committees, whose establishment was recommended by the Working Party, were envisaged as independent organisations in no way subordinate to the national body. Each State will, of course, proceed in its own way; this is the nature of Australia's federalism. The important thing is that a start has been made. It is hoped that the committees will quickly become active and play an important role in bridging the gap between voluntary agencies and the State public library network, with an emphasis on rationalisation of resources through the co-ordination of regional and local services. The ball has started rolling.

## Appendix 1

## Library Association of Australia

# STATEMENT OF POLICY ON LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE*

1 *The Library Association of Australia believes that everyone has the right of access to library services and materials to meet their needs for information, inspiration, education and recreation.*

2 *The Association supports programs that will strengthen and expand library and information services to everyone including those with physical or intellectual disabilities.*

3 *The Association encourages federal, state, regional and local authorities to provide adequate financial support to enable libraries of all types to offer the specialised services and materials needed by disabled people at a level not lower than those provided for the remainder of the community.*

4 *The Association supports efforts to ensure that library and information services complement the services to disabled people provided through voluntary and government-sponsored programs and by agencies concerned with direct support to the disabled.*

5 *The Association promotes the universal application of building standards, in particular Australian Standard 1428-1977 which will ensure maximum ease of access to library buildings for those with mobility, visual and auditory difficulties.*

6 *The Association supports efforts by the National Library and State libraries to achieve maximum access to the specialised materials required by disabled people and in ensuring that appropriate and timely arrangements are made and standards established for the production of materials for the various categories of disabled people.*

*7 The Association is concerned to ensure that copyright law provisions do not unnecessarily hinder access by disabled people to copies of material in special formats.*

**Disabled people are understood here to be those with a physical or intellectual disability which handicaps them in their use of conventional library and information services and materials.*

***Library Association of Australia***
***35 Clarence Street Sydney NSW 2000***
***Telephone (02) 29 7724***

# PHYSICAL ACCESS

**Brian Kidd**

## INTRODUCTION

The number of disabled people who use public libraries, or would do so if they had the opportunity, is indeterminable. Despite this it is essential that library buildings are accessible to disabled people, firstly because of the requirements for mandatory access in the Uniform Building Regulations (either already in existence or to be introduced in each state), and secondly because disabled people should be afforded every opportunity to maximise their potential for living.

A person with a disability may be very competent in all behaviour attributes other than those dictated by the disability. There is obviously a broad spectrum of abilities possessed by disabled people. Built environments that preclude a disabled person do not allow that person to pursue life to the fullest potential. All people are entitled to normal use of the environment. Design should ensure that a disability does not become a handicap.

## ATTITUDES

The National Survey on Library Services for Handicapped People conducted in March, 1978 found that very few library buildings and facilities were accessible to people with limited mobility.

Of the 697 library service locations surveyed:

(i) only 80 had special toilets for physically disabled people.

(ii) only 287 buildings were accessible.

(iii) only 314 had service points and catalogues that were deemed functionally convenient.

(iv) only 326 provided reserved parking bays or ample parking.

Only 26 facilities met all four conditions: 96 met three, and 183 met none.[1]

There is obviously a need for a positive policy of access for all members of the community to such a public facility. Some change in attitude will result compulsorily from legislation. Building regu-

1 National Library of Australia *Report on the National Survey of Library Services for Handicapped People.* Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1978.

lations to ensure access by disabled people to all public buildings exist in South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania, and are currently being drafted in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. This legislation will require access to all new public buildings, including libraries. What is needed, however, is a change in attitudes. Legislation only ensures basic access, but a deep understanding of human needs and rights is essential. The theme for the United Nations Year of Disabled Persons is full participation and equality. If this is to become a reality, changes are necessary in our attitudes to the built enviroment. Access to community facilities must be seen as a right for all people, not a privilege. The avoidance of handicap at the design stage is therefore the responsibility of the architect and the building owner or client group.

One of the major causes of an inaccessible or hostile physical environment is that design is generally directed toward the needs of that mythical creature 'the average human being'.[2]

Very few people fit the category however, and it could be argued that 'abnormality' is a normal part of the human life experience.

## BARRIERS

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey in 1978 indicates that 10.3% of the Australian population have their mobility limited by one or more chronic illnesses.[3] In fact we are all disabled at some time if we consider disabilities arising from illness, accident or birth defect; size; ageing; pregnancy; adults with prams, small children, shopping trolleys or luggage; temporarily injured people; and families and companions of all of these.

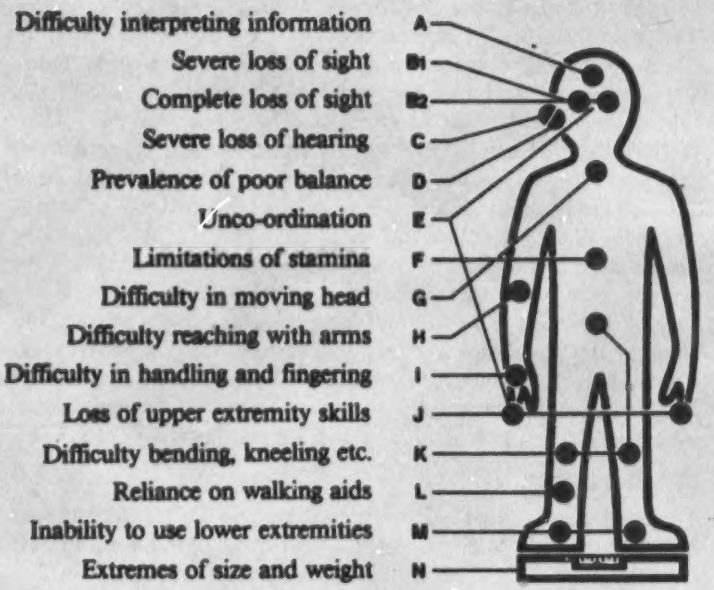
Barriers therefore are both literal (physical) and figurative (social).

The wheelchair is assumed to be the common denominator for barrier free design. However there are many more human access needs which are not satisfied by the wheelchair model. In order to demonstrate the broad range of needs, Steinfield has developed an ideogram called "the Enabler" [4] which identifies 15 areas relating to mobility limitation:

2 Kidd B.J., "The Physical Environment and Communication" in Junor, C.L. (ed.) *First National Workshop of Librarianship for Disabled Users*, Melbourne: Library Association of Australia, 1980, pp. 97-106.

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Survey of Chronic Illnesses and Impairments*, Canberra: A.B.S. 1978.

4 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Access to the Built Environment: A Review of the Literature*, Washington, H.U.D.-P.R.D., 1979, pp. 73-96.




## STAFF

Barrier-free access to libraries will benefit not only the public but also the staff. There are a variety of opportunities for disabled staff employment in libraries. All staff areas such as work spaces and staff rooms should be accessible.

## INTERNAL PLANNING

All principal areas must be accessible to chairbound people. This includes such areas as the lending library, music library, reading rooms, lecture rooms, exhibition and display areas. If a tiered lecture room is included wheelchair accessible places must be provided. If turnstile gates are included, alternative access is essential.

Levels of accessibility will vary, but service areas and store-rooms should also be barrier free, and facilities within the library should be arranged to minimise travel distances.

## SOME DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The desired aim is not to have special facilities, but to make the ordinary facility accessible. When designing or modifying buildings for accessibility, certain items are critical:

i. An easy approach to the building from the street and from the carpark areas. If no on-site car parking is provided, the nearest kerbside parking bay to the entrance should be reserved and designated for disabled drivers. Where on-site parking is provided, at least one bay should be reserved for disabled drivers. These should be designed in accordance with AS 1428-1977 Clauses 6.1 to 6.4.

ii. Level entries and doors at least 760 mm wide which open at least 90°. The preferred width is 900 mm, and the door should be easy to push open. Ideally an automatic opening sliding door is recommended, although a cost factor is involved. Such a facility is of obvious benefit to all users.

iii. A continuous circulation route within the building for staff and public users. This requires *all* doorways to be a minimum of 760 mm wide and all corridors to be a minimum of 1050 mm wide (and preferably 1200 mm), and safe access provided to fire isolation zones or fire exit areas.

iv. Toilets accessible for disabled users. At least one toilet should be a unisex wheelchair-accessible toilet, designed in accordance with AS 1428-1977 Clause 13.1.1. This toilet should also be accessible to all other users and would be practicularly useful for mothers with children. As many disabled people do not require a wheelchair-accessible toilet, at least one toilet in both the male and female toilets should be designed for ambulant disabled users in accordance with AS 1428-1977 Fig. 13.1.2. These toilets should consequently also have level access.

Other design areas are perhaps less critical in relation to basic access but nevertheless highly desirable to assist in independent operation:

i. A maximum height of 1200 mm above the level of the finished floor for light switches and door handles (as per AS 1428-1978 Clause 17.2). Other facilities such as lift buttons, or drinking fountains, telephones, fire extinguishers etc. should also be positioned bearing in mind the ergonomic needs of disabled staff and users.

ii. As the incidence of limb extremity impairment is high (due to arthritis, ageing, hemiplegia, etc.) doors with level handles or push plates are preferred to knob sets.

iii. All staircases should have handrails fitted to both sides as a particular aid to the ambulant disabled, but also as a benefit to all users. Rails should have a maximum of diameter of 40 mm and should extend at least 300 mm beyond the top and bottom risers so that users can steady their balance before and after traversing the stairs. Ideally there should be two handrails, one at 900 mm above the nosing of the treads, and one at 750 mm above the nosing to cater for children and shorter people.

iv. Clear signs are required to direct all users to emergency exits to fire safety zones. As with entrances, exits should also be free of physical barriers.

v. Visually impaired people require adequate lighting levels, definition of stair edges, raised lettering for all signs, lift buttons etc., tactile maps explaining the building layout etc. Fixed furniture placements are easier to learn.

vi. Clear and commonly recognizable symbols and graphics are essential. This will aid mentally retarded people and also non-English speaking migrants and visitors.

vii. Hearing-impaired people require clear graphics to convey all information. Visual, lighted symbols should supplement all signals or alarms given by auditory means. Acoustic considerations are important and distracting background noise should be eliminated to avoid interference (and consequent confusion and distraction) with amplification in hearing aids.

## COSTS

Cost justification of accessibility should be predicated on the bases of human rights, equal opportunities, and socio-psychological aspects. The considerable costs involved in rehabilitating a disabled person are negated if that individual is prevented by architectural barriers from participating as a social member in all aspects of community life.

Provision of access for physically disabled people in regard to building approaches, access and entrances involves no extra cost when these provisions are included at the design stage. American

estimates are that the total cost of provisions to provide access for disabled people is as little as one tenth of one percent in a new building. It is admittedly sometimes economically impractical to make existing buildings totally accessible to disabled people. In such case the management and architects must determine which areas should be made accessible.

## BOOKSHELVES, CATALOGUES, DESKS

The human range of reach should determine the location of a variety of fixtures such as door handles, window catches, light switches, power outlets, alarm controls, storage shelves, cupboard and bench heights. The able bodied adult has a reach ranging from floor level to a height of approximately 2000 mm. In contrast the wheelchair user has a narrower range of reach ranging from 600 mm to a maximum of approximately 1600 mm. Children and little people also have a height range restriction.

A desk height dimensioned to suit a wheelchair user or child would be a problem to the average ambulant adult. A section of the corner should be lowered in height to approximately 800 mm to cater for other users. Because of the severe storage limitations in all libraries, it is obviously unrealistic for both practical and financial reasons to adopt the reach of wheelchair users as the criteria for shelf heights. If the space is not at a premium, Goldsmith[5] recommends that no bookshelves be higher than the eye level of an average-height woman, i.e. 1500 mm above floor level. The lowest shelf should be no lower than 250 mm above floor level. These heights will cater reasonably for all users, including non-ambulant disabled and elderly people. In libraries where space is critical and higher shelving provided, only publications in infrequent demand should be located in shelving higher than 1500 mm. Where higher shelving is unavoidable, it will be essential for staff to provide willing assistance to obtain books for borrowers. Aisles should be a minimum of 1050 mm, with a preferred minimum of 1200 mm.

## CARRELS

Where reading carrels are provided, at least one carrel must be wide enough to accomodate a person in a wheelchair.

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5 Goldsmith, Selwyn. *Designing for the Disabled*, London: RIBA Publications Limited 1976, 74631 p. 392.

For people with readers, or any person whose disability requires them to use a typewriter, at least one carrel should be soundproof, or alternatively a soundproof room should be provided.

## FLOOR SURFACES

Floor surfaces must be even, stable and non-slip. They must not prevent the passage of a wheelchair or cause people to lose balance. Thick pile carpets are not recommended. Wheelchair users can negotiate abrupt level changes of 15 mm maximum depending on the complexity of the manoeuvre. Threshold can present extreme obstacles because of the manoeuvering action required to open doors.

## HAZARDS

Objects likely to be a hazard to people with impaired vision should either be detectable with a cane, or recessed. Windows or other fixtures should not protrude into pedestrian use areas. The underside of staircases and sheet glass must be protected by guardrails to prevent visually impaired people or absent-minded persons from harm. Other free standing objects could desirably be denoted by a change in floor surface. The top and bottom landing of steps should have a tactile warning strip or change of flooring material.

## CHECKLIST

It is recommended that a simple checklist be used by each library to ascertain basic provisions or problems in relation to disabled users. A sample checklist is included.

# ACROD VICTORIAN COMMITTEE ON ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED
# CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

**Name of building:**

**Address:**

**Assessor:**

N.B. All buildings should adhere to A.S. 1428-1977: "Design Rules for Access and Mobility", and to the provisions of the Uniform Building Regulations.

Circle YES or NO (Complete answer in space provided when necessary)

**1. OFFSTREET PARKING**

a. Is an offstreet parking area available adjacent to building? YES NO

b. Is there a specially provided parking bay for a disabled driver? (It should be 1½ times wider than a normal bay) YES NO

c. If adjacent offstreet parking is not available, identify and give location of nearest and most convenient parking area:

d. Is parking area and building separated by a street? YES NO

e. Is the surface of the parking area smooth and hard (i.e. not sand or gravel, etc.)? YES NO

**2. APPROACH TO MAIN ENTRANCE**

a. Is the main entrance at street level? YES NO

b. If not, is there an alternate entrance at street level? YES NO

c. Is there a sign directing people to this entrance? YES NO

d. Is the approach to the entrance door level? YES NO

e. Is there a ramp in the approach to or at the entrance? (The ramp should be no steeper than 1 in 12, and should be non-slip) YES NO

f. If the entrance has steps, can a ramp be incorporated? YES NO

g. If there are steps, give total number

h. If there are steps, are the treads between 260mm and 300mm wide? YES NO

i. If there are steps, are the risers between 150mm and 165mm high? YES NO

j. Are there sturdy handrails? (These should be on both sides, at 865mm to 900mm high and 50mm clear of the wall) YES NO

k. Is lighting adequate? YES NO

l. Is there a kerbed ramp between carpark and entry? YES NO

3. ENTRANCE DOORWAY

a. Is the entry door a minimum 760mm clear width (to allow wheelchair access)? YES NO

b. Is the door easy to open? (There should not be a heavy spring or a heavy closer on the door) YES NO

c. Is the door handle lower than 1400mm above the floor? YES NO

d. Is there an automatically operated door? (Note that revolving doors and turnstiles are unsuitable for the non-ambulant, and some ambulant, disabled people) YES NO

4. INTERIORS

a. Are floor surfaces non-slip? YES NO

b. Are corridors at least 1200mm wide? (This width allows room to turn around in a wheelchair) YES NO

c. Are all doorways 760mm clear min. width? YES NO

d. Are counters, benches or catalogues a max. height of 750mm? (This allows use from a wheelchair) YES NO

e. Are bookshelves higher than 1600mm? YES NO
f. Is lighting adequate? YES NO
g. Are there any steps between essential areas not served by an elevator? YES NO
h. Are special visual or audio aids available? YES NO

5. **ELEVATORS**
   a. Is there a passenger elevator? YES NO
   b. Does it serve all essential areas? YES NO
   c. What is clear door width? _____

   YES NO
   d. Are controls set at a max. height of 1400mm?

6. **PUBLIC TELEPHONE**
   a. Where is the most accessible phone located? _____
   b. What type (booth, wall, desk)? _____
   c. If phone is in booth, what is clear width of door? _____

   YES NO
   d. Is the handset 1200mm max. height above floor?
   e. Does the phone have an amplifying device for the hard of hearing? YES NO

7. **TOILETS**
   a. Is a specially designed wheelchair-accessible toilet available? YES NO
   b. Are doorways 7600mm minimum width? YES NO
   c. Can people in wheelchairs shut the door when they are in the toilet? YES NO
   d. Are there grab rails to left and right of the pedestal pan? YES NO
   e. Is the height of the cistern button less than 1200mm? YES NO

f. Is the toilet paper holder located close to the pan? YES NO

g. Is there a minimum of 1200mm diameter turning space in the wash room area? YES NO

h. Are wash basins wall mounted? YES NO

i. Do tap controls have a central outlet? YES NO

**8. ASSISTANCE AND AIDS AVAILABLE**

a. Is car parking assistance available? YES NO

b. Is help always available for people needing assistance in entering (i.e. a doorman or porter)? YES NO

c. If not, is help available for people needing assistance if arranged for in advance? YES NO

d. Who is to be contacted in advance for assistance? _____

e. What is their telephone number? _____

f. Are wheelchairs available? YES NO

**9. EMERGENCY EXITS**

a. Are emergency exits available within the building? YES NO

b. Where is emergency exit located? YES NO

**10. COMMENTS**

a. Are Large Print books available? YES NO

b. Are Housebound Deliveries available? YES NO

c. Are other services available? (e.g. Toy Library, Other) YES NO

d. Other comments _____